

Taking Care--Documenting the Occupational Culture of Home Care Workers  
Archie Green Fellows Project, 2014-2015  
(AFC 2014/021: 01260)  
Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**Maleta Christian interview, 2014-11-17 : interview conducted by Sonia De La Cruz and Nathan J. Moore**

**INTERVIEW LOG**

Interview Log for afc2014021\_01260\_sr01:

00:00:18: Name is Maleta Christian. Born 1966.

00:00:27: Has lived in Roseburg, Oregon, since birth. Loves the area.

00:00:47: Works as a personal support worker for adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Works one-on-one with customers.

00:01:10: Previous jobs: preschool teacher, social worker, worked for Head Start in Roseburg. Worked as a teacher/social worker at Family Development Center, which provides child abuse and neglect prevention services. Worked former jobs for almost 15 years.

00:00:46: Became a personal support worker when budget cuts eliminated previous job. Devastated at first. Initially became a receptionist for Southern Oregon Regional Brokerage (SORB), then was recruited to be a personal support worker based on ability to develop rapport with consumers.

00:02:55: Brokerage is a fiscal intermediary. Personal agents help clients with individual service plans make sure their needs are being met.

00:03:21: Caregiving is similar to being a preschool teacher. Example: lots of repetition. Different because it is more one-on-one and involves working in someone's home.

00:03:59: Special skills/qualities needed to become a caregiver? Yes. Patience. Also, important to understand disabilities. Previous experience with children with developmental disabilities has been helpful. Has a brother with developmental disabilities and watched him grow up without services.

00:05:09: There are official training programs through the Home Care Commission. Trainings brought about by SEIU [Service Employees International Union]. Home care workers had trainings before personal support workers. Discusses special training on how to prevent self-injurious behavior.

00:05:52: Trainings have been very helpful.

00:06:04: No such thing as a typical day (laughing). A day with a single client might involve preparing medication and meals, scheduling. Consumers do as much care for themselves as possible. Support worker may help with getting dressed or washing hair. Some clients take longer to get the day started. Positive reinforcement and praise is important.

00:08:10: Discusses working on behavior skills. Helps with “emotional coaching,” such as breathing, relaxing, dealing with anxiety. Offers suggestions about how to deal with sadness and anger.

00:08:43: Other activities—swinging, exercising, swimming.

00:08:50: Important to maintain schedule when working with multiple consumers. Assists with budgeting, making grocery lists, reading food labels. Helps with cooking by color-coding measuring cups and spoons. Works to help clients feel independent. The more independent they feel, the more empowered they are.

00:09:52: Has traveled to Salem with consumers to share stories with legislators. Empowering for consumers to share their stories. She wants to go to every lobby day.

00:11:23: Important for politicians to hear consumers’ stories, especially when programs are getting cut. Budget cuts mean that consumers will have to enter foster care.

00:11:55: A bus takes people to the State Capitol. Discusses going to lobby days when she was still a receptionist.

00:12:15: No songs or chants at the lobby days. Lots of speaking and storytelling. Remembers supporting a client of SORB when she told her story at the State Capitol. Empowering to just sit and be there for her. Consumers were excited to support a peer.

00:13:40: Speaking to legislators changes consumers. Remembers consumer who got her own place, moved to a safer situation, and gained new skills; consumer frequently said, “If it wasn’t for you, I couldn’t do this.”

00:14:40: Acts a friend, counselor, shopper, and a liaison for customers when they visit doctors. Consumers do not always know what to say and personal support worker can step in and explain situations. Also been a liaison with attorneys.

00:15:30: Do you become close with customers? Yes, but there are boundaries. Does not go to birthday parties or family functions. Shares parenting experiences with consumers, if helpful.

00:16:10: Do you get to know their families? Yes. Works side by side with some families. Parents of current consumer happy to have someone on their team. Models behavior for families.

00:17:21: Can be very hard to maintain boundaries with consumers and families. Does not work weekends unless there is something that a consumer really wants to do. Gives the example of a consumer wanting to go to a dance, but family will not drive after dark. Will take the time to help consumer be part of a community. Depends on the situation.

00:18:12: Does not let consumers stay at her house. Will take them on trips to Wildlife Safari, parks, the YMCA.

00:19:00: Consumers do not become like family, although it is hard to maintain boundaries. Just wants to take them all home (laughing).

00:19:30: Are there words to describe the job that only home care workers would understand? Does not know. Not always an opportunity to speak with other caregivers and personal support workers.

00:19:50: Words to describe the job: rewarding, emotionally taxing, empowering. Also a learning experience; customers share knowledge, too.

00:20:29: Caregivers get together at trainings or at regional union meetings and talk about pay and healthcare. Home care workers have had health care longer than personal support workers. Personal support workers have only had healthcare for one year. Talk is also about differences and similarities in jobs and ways that both groups “de-stress.” Lots of networking.

00:22:10: Do you share jokes or funny stories? Yes—icebreakers, funny and sad stories.

00:22:35: Very important to have a sense of humor. Humor can be used to show clients and families that it is okay to be silly. Examples: silly dancing to music, splashing water. Helps when customers are feeling sad by bringing up endorphins.

00:23:55: Currently works about 100 hours per month with one client, which is not that much. Full-time is 160 hours per month.

00:24:10: When workers get together, they also talk about raises. Home care workers do not get paid as much as personal support workers. Wages are different, depending on the consumer, contract, and how much money is available. This can be touchy. She does not share what she makes.

00:24:51: Since joining the union, she has noticed home care workers and personal support workers working together more. More cohesive at meetings instead of “us and them.”

00:25:41: Has developed leadership skills as a union member. Works now on general council, which is run by members. Very empowering. Has been on several committees, went to the Labor Education & Research Center’s summer school. Met other union members and educated them about what home care workers and personal support workers do.

00:26:38: Challenging herself to go outside of comfort zone. Wants to be an advocate for people that cannot leave homes. Wants them to be able to stay independent.

00:27:04: Knew there were a lot of home care workers and personal support workers before the union, but not the full extent.

00:27:26: Mostly women work in the industry, but her assistant director is a man. Three or four men came to last union meeting.

00:27:50: Has not been involved in bargaining, but is going to rallies in January.

00:28:23: “We’re always in purple.” Members wear union colors at legislature, council meetings, and rallies. She wears union shirt in Roseburg. It says, “We’re here. We’re strong. And I’m proud.”

00:29:14: Hobbies: cake decorating and photography. Makes cakes for family members and friends. Listens to music and thinks about the person that the cake is for.

00:30:08: Brings hobbies to the job. Taught one consumer how to make cupcakes.

00:30:56: Hobbies help with relaxation. Allows for focusing on self and the beauty around her.

00:31:32: Has been cake decorating for four years. Took some classes. Has been doing photography since childhood. Photography brought her closer to one consumer.

00:33:04: Nicknames for consumers? Depends on the person. Some consumers do not appreciate being called something different. Calls a couple of consumers “my sister-girl.”

00:33:47: Has worked with consumers of all different ages, from people in their twenties to almost sixty.

00:34:03: Plans on continuing for as long as body allows and as long as there are people who want her to.

00:34:19: Rewarding to see someone who could not leave house without putting something in mouth be able to look up and out. It shows pride.

00:35:41: Anything people might find surprising about the job? Some people think she just changes diapers and feeds people. Those are just some of the things you might do to help someone be independent. People think that if you are disabled, you cannot do anything. She works to empower clients so they can do things for themselves. They are smart and just want to be independent.

00:36:57: Empowerment—it is important for everyone to have.

00:37:55: Any memory or experience that stands out? Recently had a challenge working with a consumer’s family members. Had to tell consumer that it is not okay for her mother to use her money in inappropriate ways.

00:40:05: Worked with a consumer who lost mother. Had to help her work through grief. Called consumer on her birthday to tell her, “Happy Birthday, baby girl.” Made her a cake on the anniversary of her mother’s death. Does not know what the consumer would have done without her help.

00:41:40: There are trainings for support workers to help consumers through grief, but consumers have to be ready. It is their choice. People do not always understand that it is their choice to do things. This can be empowering, but frustrating. Consumers do not always make the best choices. Example: eating a whole tube of cookie dough. Natural consequences become learning tools.

00:44:25: Using preschool teaching skills has been key to working with some adults.

00:45:18: Has a certificate of appreciation for being a union director. The experience has been great; helped her step out of comfort zone. Usually does not drive in cities and has high anxiety. Knows work will help people who cannot help themselves.

00:47:34: End of Part 1.

Interview log for afc2014021\_01260\_sr02:

00:00:05: Works primarily with women. Does not want to work in a situation in which consumer can claim sexual harassment or vice versa. Some women do not want male providers because they have been abused.

00:00:46: Usually women work with women and men work with men. There are some exceptions.

00:01:21: End of Part 2.